

**CUSTOMER SERVICE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT  
THE FOUR “C’s”**

**by**

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT THE FOUR “C’s”**

So much is written about customer service in business, one can hardly walk through a book store or browse a website home page without becoming enticed by the eye-catching headlines and titles relating to latest-and-greatest solutions. But what about customer service in law enforcement? Little is written on the topic, considering that the majority of police departments in America use the words “customer” or “service” in their mission statement or department brand. This article will explore what a customer service model for law enforcement might look like, and will illustrate the differences between public safety and business as it relates to customer service and satisfaction. The article will also identify who the true customers of law enforcement might be, and how we should serve them to achieve a true sense of customer satisfaction.

### Customer Service in Business

Dr. Jon Anton, Director of benchmark research at Purdue University’s Center for Customer-Driven Quality, was asked during an interview how the quality of service can affect an enterprise. He answered, in part, “happy customers are going to buy more products and let others know that they’re satisfied.”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Anton also proposed that providing excellent customer service can be an ideal way to make a company distinctly more competitive. Certainly, successful businesses all pay strict attention to their customers, and to the relationships they find beneficial to their bottom line. Let’s look at a few noted examples.

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<sup>1</sup> “Why Customer Service Matters.” Sun Executive Boardroom.  
<http://www.sun.com/emrkt/boardroom/newsletter.html> (accessed June 20, 2008).

## **Amway**

Greater market shares and profitability are the positive results of a company's good customer service practices. The Amway Corporation set these as their goals after a study to determine the company's customer satisfaction rating was conducted and the results came back as less than positive. After a redesign of the company's core customer service model, the company set out to achieve greater customer satisfaction and generate repeat orders as a result.<sup>2</sup> As noted on their website, one of Amway's corporate goals is to "provide products and services that offer superior quality and value" and by doing this, they hope to realize the company's vision to "help people live better lives."<sup>3</sup>

## **Dell Computers**

Michael Dell, the founder of Dell Computers has forged a unique environment for its employees and customers that is referred to as the "Soul of Dell," according to the company's web site. The Soul of Dell's customer service model includes the belief by all employees that by being committed to direct relationships and providing a superior experience at a great value they will create loyal customers.<sup>4</sup> The "Soul of Dell" defines the kind of company Dell is and aspires to become, and serves as a guide for employee's actions around the world and ultimately forms the basis of Dell's "winning culture."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Process Redesign Brings Profitability wins at Amway." Case study. IDS Scheer. [www.ids-scheer.com/retail](http://www.ids-scheer.com/retail) (accessed July 2, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Amway Business Opportunity – Guiding Vision, <http://www.amway.com/en/BusOpp/Vision-10107.aspx> (accessed July 14, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> "Soul of Dell." <http://www.dell.com/content/topics/global.aspx.soulofdell> (accessed July 6, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## **Southwest Airlines**

Southwest Airlines has taken customer service a step further and has posted, on their website, their “customer service commitment” which includes internal policies and procedures as their way of being transparent to their customers. One of the items included in the customer service commitment explains airline “overbooking - what it is and why do it?” Southwest Airlines’ desire is to continually meet the expectations of its valued customers and wants them to have a basic understanding of how the company operates.<sup>6</sup> Through its customer service mission statement: “The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride and company spirit,” the company has enjoyed the airline industry’s best cumulative consumer satisfaction record, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation.<sup>7</sup>

## **Starbucks**

According to Joseph A. Michelli in his book, The Starbucks Experience, part of what makes Starbucks an extraordinary company is its operational focus on consistency. One of the company’s guidelines, the “Everything Matters” principle, reflects the importance of solid processes and procedures in daily operations. This operational focus ensures consistency for customer visits across Starbucks stores anywhere in the country.<sup>8</sup> Michelli goes on to explain that “with consistency comes customer trust. Consumers gain stability when they know they can depend on having a reliable experience.

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<sup>6</sup> “Customer Service Commitment.” [www.southwest.com](http://www.southwest.com). Accessed June 26, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph A. Michelli, The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary, 2007 McGraw-Hill, 53.

Consistency is crucial for success in a world that is unpredictable.”<sup>9</sup> According to Michelli, the Starbucks model of customer service is: *Be genuine*. To a Starbuck’s partner, being genuine means to “connect, discover and respond.” Focusing on these three elements with each customer interaction forms a quality relationship. By contrast, Michelli says, how many of us have been served by people who gave the impression that they couldn’t have cared less?<sup>10</sup>

Each of the above organizations share a common desire to offer the best possible service or product with the end result being happy and returning customers. In policing, though, the desired end-state of customer relations is different than the business models as illustrated above.

### The Difference

There are two fundamental differences between the customer service goals of a business and those of a law enforcement agency, both having a direct correlation to the type of customer served and the initial reason for the interaction. In law enforcement, the protection of life and property requires a very different model of customer service than the profit-generating approaches as mentioned above.

Contrary to the business models, a police department’s motivation behind offering good customer service would not be the same as what Dr. Anton described as being the focus of the business community. The “customers” of law enforcement are often witnesses to,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 25.

or victims of crime and are requesting the service of the police during or after, what could be a highly emotional or traumatic event. This, of course, illustrates one of the elemental differences between business and law enforcement-related customer service.

The second differentiation is, where businesses provide a quality of service or product they envision as adequate to generate a sentiment to bring their customers back for more, the police would want to offer service sufficient to ensure the customer doesn't have to come back for more. Law enforcement's direct clients - the citizen, the business owner, the person who has just been involved in a traffic collision - are the people who are calling upon their police departments, and who should be receiving the best personal attention and service possible. This is why it is so critical that each interaction between the police and its customers are of the highest quality possible. It may be the last time that the person will need the service of the police, but the impression left with the customer will be lasting.

According to a 2004 article printed in *Police Chief Magazine*, although the majority of the public has a substantial degree of confidence in the police as a general institution, it has been declining slowly since 1996.<sup>11</sup> Further, considering today's economy and the uncertainty of the future of America's cities and towns will be, it is imperative that law enforcement leaders consider and be cognizant of consumer confidence and trust. This, then, would invoke an extension of Anton's premise: the sole motivation to offer

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<sup>11</sup> Gary J. Margolis and Noel C. March, "Branding Your Agency: Creating the Police Department's Image," *Police Chief*, April 2004.

exemplary customer service in the business world is to keep customers happy. Shouldn't police managers want to do the same?

### Customer Service in Law Enforcement

The concept of customer service in law enforcement, although conspicuously undefined, can create in one's mind an almost limitless array of ideas and images of systems, procedures and responses. According to Ron Kaufman (customerservicepoint.com), a business model of customer service is defined as a function of how well an organization is able to "constantly and consistently exceed the needs of the customer."<sup>12</sup> The customer service aspect of law enforcement, however, is largely undocumented, and not much is written on how the police community is doing to *constantly and consistently exceed the needs of the customer*. In fact, one of the most comprehensive publications in print regarding police management, the ICMA's Local Government Police Management, is devoid of content with regard to anything under the subject heading "customer."<sup>13</sup>

When considering what customer service in law enforcement really means, it becomes important to identify who the true customers of law enforcement are. One might argue the 'customer' is the perpetrator of a crime; the criminal who, by nature, represents a core reason for which law enforcement exists. But for purposes of offering a service to the community, the customer, or client, should be identified as one who is served **by** law enforcement: the citizen, the business owner, the person requesting information or

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<sup>12</sup> Ron Kaufman, "A Customer Service Definition from the Customer's Point of View." CustomerServicePoint.Com, <http://www.customerservicepoint.com/customer-service-definition.html> (accessed January 24, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> William A.Geller and Darrel W. Stephens, eds. *Local Government Police Management*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (International City/County Management Association, 2003), index.



assistance and some form of a response. In a published 2005 interview, Police Chief Michael Masterson of the Boise, Idaho Police Department identified the customers of the police as “the community, local law enforcement agencies, city departments, state and federal agencies and people visiting Boise.”<sup>14</sup> The City of Clearwater, Florida Police Department has publicly acknowledged that their customers are the residents of Clearwater. Consider this loose analogy: the customer, for the police, is not the criminal, just like the customer for *Orkin*® is not the bug.

In terms of customer service for law enforcement, think of the four “C’s” for the police: Customer – Contact – Citizen – Community. To further expand on this concept, the following are a few illustrations of what some police departments are doing to demonstrate their commitment to serving their public.

#### **Customer** – Contact – Citizen – Community

In 1990, the City of Clearwater Florida Police Department began conducting a semi-annual survey of its residents – its customers - to determine how the department could better serve its citizens. In the study, of the nearly 3300 customers surveyed, more than 95 percent of the respondents reported their contact with the police was for something other than being arrested.<sup>15</sup> 17.6% respondents reported being a victim of a crime, 15.9% were witnesses to a crime, incident or accident and nearly 11% were personally involved

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<sup>14</sup> Interview posted on cityofboise.org, [http://www.cityofboise.org/financial\\_management/BudgetOffice/FY06FY07/Departments/...](http://www.cityofboise.org/financial_management/BudgetOffice/FY06FY07/Departments/...) (accessed July 10, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> “Clearwater Police Department Customer Satisfaction Survey Executive Summary.” <http://www.clearwaterpolice.org/survey/index.asp> (accessed June 30, 2008).

in a motor vehicle accident. By recognizing who the customers of the Clearwater Police Department are and by proactively seeking their opinions and assessing their level of satisfaction with the service provided, the organization has benefitted.

According to the City's official website, the results of the latest survey were released on August 21, 2002. Police Chief Sid Klein (in his executive summary) wrote that the underlying philosophy behind the survey was that the "citizens of Clearwater are our customers, and as such, we need to know how we are doing."<sup>16</sup> Throughout the years of the survey, the customers' primary concerns remained constant and, in response to those concerns, the police department developed specific goals and objectives aimed at addressing those concerns. According to Chief Klein's executive summary, the survey process has provided the department numerous benefits. Chief Klein wrote "Over the years, it has provided us with the mechanism to clearly focus our award-winning community policing strategies and to develop other programs that help meet the needs of our citizens. From this survey we can only grow."

Taking another approach to customer service, the Redmond, Washington Police Department developed a customer service guide for use by members of the community. On the cover of the guide is written: "The women and men of the Redmond Police Department are committed to delivering the highest level of service to their customers."<sup>17</sup> The guide, available on the department's web site, provides the populace with a list of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "The City of Redmond Police Customer Service Guide."  
<http://www.ci.redmond.wa.us/insidecityhall/police/pdfs/PoliceCustomerService.pdf> (accessed July 1, 2008).

resources available through the police department, from how to get copies of traffic accident reports to information about volunteering.

These two examples show us that the customer, for these police departments, is the person who requires a service, whether that be as the victim of a crime or one who simply needs information in order to continue with their quest.

Customer – **Contact** – Citizen – Community

As stated earlier, the Boise, Idaho Police Department identifies its customers as nearly everyone they come into contact with. The Chief of Police describes the customers of Boise as “the community, other agencies, other city departments and anyone who visits Boise.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the City of Loveland, Colorado, as part of their customer service mission statement, states they value their customers, and define their customers as “everyone we encounter.”<sup>19</sup> According to the Webster’s Dictionary, *contact* means “the state of being in communication.” Maintaining the philosophy that the customer, for the police, is the person who requires a service or information, and again, showing the similarities and interchangeable qualities of the concept of the four C’s, a “contact” for the police is the same as the “customer.” It is the person served, the person communicated with, the person the police come into contact with on a day-to-day basis.

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<sup>18</sup> Interview posted on cityofboise.org, [http://www.cityofboise.org/financial\\_management/BudgetOffice/FY06FY07/Departments/...](http://www.cityofboise.org/financial_management/BudgetOffice/FY06FY07/Departments/...) (accessed July 10, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Customer Service Mission Statement – City of Loveland, <http://www.ci.loveland.co.us/council/customerservice.htm> (accessed June 30, 2008).

Customer – Contact – **Citizen** – Community

In an effort to make a strong connection with its citizenry, The City of Thousand Oaks, California Police Department is involving its citizens in combating crime through e-mail and has established an e-mail data base of over 4,000 citizen participants.<sup>20</sup> The program, called “City Watch,” is designed to empower citizens within the community to detect and deter crime. This is accomplished by police sending detailed information to individual citizens about crimes that are occurring. The information provided to citizens will include enough detail as to allow the citizen to identify possible suspects or suspect vehicles and to call the department with the information. One of the goals of the program is to allow citizens to work individually with the police department to provide a crime free environment in the City of Thousand Oaks. In a letter by the department’s Crime Prevention Sergeant, City Watch participants were told that their involvement helped to increase the overall atmosphere of safety and security in the City of Thousand Oaks.<sup>21</sup>

According to a 2001 article in the Cincinnati Enquirer, the Cincinnati Police Department stresses customer service by pushing it in meetings, training sessions, roll calls and at the police academy. Because of their focus toward customer service, the police department began a process in 1997 of asking citizens who have filed minor complaints against officers to have face-to-face meetings with those officers and their supervisors.<sup>22</sup>

Police Chief Tom Streicher said in the article, “it is a key to good relationships between officers and the community.”

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<sup>20</sup> Rachel McGrath, “Combating Crime Through E-mail,” *Ventura County Star*, 22 September 2007 B14.

<sup>21</sup> Sergeant James Fryhoff, Thousand Oaks Police Department, telephone interview, 5 June 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Anglen, “Police Talk Up Customer Service,” Cincinnati Enquirer, 8 July 2001, [enquirer.com, http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/08/loc\\_police\\_talk\\_up.html](http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/08/loc_police_talk_up.html) (accessed July 10, 2008).

In corroboration of who these two departments identify as their customer, the term “citizen,” according to *Yourdictionary.com*, is defined as: inhabitant, native, taxpayer, civilian, urbanite, member of the community, householder, occupant, registered voter, dweller, immigrant, naturalized person, townsman, freeman, the man in the street, villager.

Customer – Contact – Citizen – **Community**

As stated on the Minneapolis Police Department’s web site, the mission of that department is “To prevent crime and improve community satisfaction.” The published set of values includes the phrase “serve and work with our community.”<sup>23</sup> A brief history of the Minneapolis Police Department shows that after turmoil and reform of the 1960’s, the department’s Community Relations Division was formed in 1970. The 1980’s and 1990’s saw community oriented policing evolve from an effort to get closer to the community to today’s fully staffed Community Crime Prevention Unit. Today, according to the city’s web site, “the MPD has approximately 800 sworn officers and 300 civilian employees, all of whom are fully dedicated to ushering in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with their commitment to community-oriented policing and the people they serve.”<sup>24</sup>

In the examples above, one can see the common theme of customer service in law enforcement involves the four elements, Customer, Contact, Citizen and Community, which are interchangeable and, for the most part, synonymous. In each of the department programs described, the customer is clearly the same as the citizen, the contact or the

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<sup>23</sup> “Inside the Minneapolis Police Department,” <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/police/about/> (accessed June 30, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

community. The concept of the four “C’s” can be summed up in terms of the following service model for law enforcement: The police department serves the community, treats citizens as clients and makes each contact important and meaningful, giving the customer the very best service and leaving the very best impression possible.

### Technological Impact

Dr. Jon Anton, an expert in the field of customer service, said “Ideally, customer service in the new millennium enables customers to help themselves in every possible way, but should also provide the option for immediate assistance – but only if needed.”<sup>25</sup> The City of Cincinnati, Ohio Police Department has adopted this philosophy as well. Visitors to the police department’s web site homepage will find a menu choice entitled “Help Yourself.” In this section, customers are provided with a collection of links that can be used to help themselves to various services offered by the police department. Links to auctions, applications, permits and calendars of events can be found here.<sup>26</sup>

In today’s economic and political climate, law enforcement managers across the country are examining ways to reduce the time a police officer spends handling non-emergency calls. The traditional response to calls for service is being looked at in terms of overall effectiveness and is being compared to more unconventional methods of reporting and documenting crime, such as internet-based crime reporting systems.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Why Customer Service Matters.” Sun Executive Boardroom.  
<http://www.sun.com/emrkt/boardroom/newsletter.html> (accessed June 20, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> “Help Yourself.” City of Cincinnati, <http://cincinnati-oh.gov/police/pages/-14055-/> (accessed July 10, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Gordon, “Police Take Reports of Crime via Web,” *Press Enterprise*, 8 May 2007, B2.

As police departments begin to explore the feasibility of non-traditional technologically-based methods for how they respond to and to and report crimes, it will be important to ensure that the convenience of technology does not take a front seat to personal service. Citizens should be allowed a choice in how their request for service is addressed. How, for example, will a citizen perceive the police if the one time they need assistance they are told that, due to budget cuts, an officer will not be responding, but they can fill out a report on-line? The most important thing a police department can do to reduce fear is to be as much a presence in the mind of citizens as it can be.<sup>28</sup> Research from the 1970's and 1980's revealed the police cannot succeed in their efforts without an effective partnership with the community they police. Further, the community itself is the first line of defense in controlling both crime and fear.<sup>29</sup>

To provide the best service possible, police agencies should allow their customers choices in how they manage their contact with the police. Departments must take the time to get to know who their customers are and, as much as possible, tailor service models to meet the individual needs of the population.

## Conclusion

Police managers are themselves consumers, and have experienced good service and poor service from businesses they have patronized. By gleaning from personal experience and reading about customer service practices used by successful businesses, so much good information can be passed along to the men and women who serve our communities. The

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<sup>28</sup> William Geller, ed. *Local Government Police Management*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Montgomery, AL: Davis Publishing Company, 1995), 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

first and last impression made by our police employees can have far-reaching consequences. By making every impression count, being genuine, connecting with the customer, taking time to listen and understand and giving the customer the impression that their concern is important, departments will gain the support and confidence of their citizens. Our customers may not need us again, but we should hope that the one time they do, the impression we leave them with will be a good one, one in which they will pass along to their neighbors and friends.